



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

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SEATON ANNOUNCES CLOSURE OF BRISTOL BAY ALASKA RED SALMON FISHERY

Secretary of the Interior Fred A. Seaton today announced that the Department has decided to close the world-famous Bristol Bay red salmon fishery to commercial fishing for the 1959 season, except for a very small subsistence-type set net fishery by the local residents of this isolated section of Alaska. The regulations are under preparation and will soon appear in the Federal Register.

The Secretary explained that relatively small salmon runs expected this year will not support a domestic fishery in addition to a substantial Japanese harvest of this resource on the high seas and provide a minimum escapement. The relatively small size of the 1959 Bristol Bay run is the result of small spawning escapements in the brood years 1953-55. These fish have a life cycle of 4 to 6 years and spend the first 2 or 3 years in the streams and lakes of Alaska. The Japanese High Seas Salmon Fishery has, since 1955, added an unpredictable factor affecting red salmon runs destined for Bristol Bay spawning streams.

Under the provisions of the International Convention for the High Seas Fisheries of the North Pacific, signed at Tokyo in 1952, the Japanese agreed to abstain from salmon fishing east of a line established provisionally at about 175 degrees west longitude, approximately 600 miles west of Bristol Bay, in consideration of the United States programs of investigation and regulation of the fishery in the interest of conservation and in consideration of full utilization of the resource by the United States. The line was established provisionally in view of the scant knowledge then available on the distribution of Asian and North American salmon in

the North Pacific and has been fully observed by the Japanese. However, extensive research in recent years has established that substantial numbers of Bristol Bay fish migrate far west of that line into waters which in some years have been heavily fished by the Japanese.

In 1958, despite a relatively small Japanese catch in waters frequented by Bristol Bay fish, the run entering Bristol Bay was the smallest on record. The commercial catch by Bristol Bay fishermen was only 3 million, and the escapement to spawning streams was $2\frac{1}{2}$ million—whereas there should have been 5 million to properly insure the perpetuation of this cycle of salmon. A run of similar magnitude is expected this year. While mindful of the hardship that will be experienced by Bristol Bay fishermen, the Department has no alternative to the closure of the fishery in order to preserve the resource.

The Secretary stated that efforts to resolve this critical problem through the North Pacific Fisheries Commission and also through direct discussions with the Japanese Government have not been successful. Looking to the future, Secretary Seaton said that if a satisfactory level of salmon escapement is achieved this year, and if there is agreement in the North Pacific Fisheries Commission on further measures, it will be possible to permit resumption of a commercial fishery in Bristol Bay in the future.

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